

Claims:

1. (previously presented) A data port interface apparatus connected between a communications network and a utility user's household, said data port interface comprising:
 - (a) a utility meter for measuring utility usage in said household of a utility delivered to said household, said utility meter having a housing and
 - (b) a computer disposed within said utility meter housing and connected to said utility meter, said computer providing an interface between said communications network and a device located internal to said utility user's household and able to process information received over said communications network for use in said device.
2. (original) A data port interface apparatus as recited in claim 1, wherein said device comprises a communications device and said computer is adapted to communicate with said communication device located within said utility user's structure.
3. (original) A data port interface apparatus as recited in claim 2, wherein said computer includes a voice processor and said communications network includes telephone lines, said voice processor being adapted for transmitting and receiving voice and data information within said utility user's structure.
4. (original) A data port interface apparatus as recited in claim 1, wherein said communication network is selected from the group consisting of fiber optic cable, a coaxial cable, a twisted pair cable, electric power lines and wireless transmission media.
5. (original) A data port interface apparatus as recited in claim 1, wherein said computer further comprises a data storage device operable to store information received from said communications network for use in said household.

6. (original) A data port interface apparatus as recited in claim 5, wherein said computer includes means for detecting a power outage and said device comprises a telephone, said data storage device being adapted for storing digitized voice messages generated a utility company and received by said data port interface, and said computer being adapted to retrieve said stored digitized voice messages from said data storage device and communicating said retrieved data to said telephone when said computer detects a power outage.
7. (previously presented) A data port interface apparatus as recited in claim 5, wherein said computer includes means for detecting a power outage and means for detecting a satellite identified location, and wherein said computer is adapted to communicate with a utility company through said communication network to thereby inform said utility company of the location at the time of an emergency condition.
8. (original) A data port interface apparatus as recited in claim 5, wherein said computer further comprises a video processor for receiving video information from said communications network, said computer operable to store received video information on said storage device and to retrieve said stored video information for delivery to said utility user's structure.
9. (original) A data port interface apparatus as recited in claim 5, wherein said utility meter comprises an electric power meter and said device comprises a home device selected from the group consisting of an air conditioner, a heater, and hot water heater, said computer being programmed to modify the thermostat settings for at least one of said home devices as a function of changes in the cost or availability of electric power.
10. (original) A data port interface apparatus as recited in claim 5, wherein said device is selected from the group consisting of a television, a computer and a telephone, said computer being adapted to receive utility messages generated a utility company and received by said data port interface and said communicating said messages to said

television, computer or telephone.

11. (previously presented) A method of conducting secured financial transactions comprising the step of using the data port interface apparatus of claim 1 as a data port terminal over a communications network, and comprising the further steps of:
 1. initiating a secured transaction from said data port terminal;
 2. transmitting a data port serial number corresponding to said data port as part of said initiated secured transaction to a financial institution over said communications network;
 3. associating said data port serial number with a unique initial key number; and
 4. verifying the identity of said data port.

12. (previously presented) A method of conducting a secured purchase comprising the step of using the data port interface apparatus of claim 1 as a data port terminal over the Internet, comprising the steps of:
 1. initiating a secured transaction from said data port terminal;
 2. transmitting identification information for a credit card over the Internet to a vendor 630;
 3. verifying whether said credit or debit card is sufficiently funded; and
 4. verifying whether said secured transaction was initiated from said data port terminal.

13. (original) The method of claim 12, further comprising the step of determining whether said vendor is not trustworthy.

14. (previously presented) A method for conducting secure computing, comprising the step of sealing the data port interface apparatus of claim 1 connected between a communications network and a utility user's structure, and the further steps of:
 - (a) inputting data within the utility user's structure;

- (b) transmitting said data from within said structure to the sealed data port interface apparatus connected between a communications network and said utility user's structure;
 - (c) detecting whether any breaches in said sealed data port interface apparatus have occurred; and
 - (a) transmitting said data from said data port interface apparatus to said utility only if no breaches are detected.
15. (previously presented) The method of claim 14, wherein said data inputting step comprises Internet browsing.
16. (previously presented) The method of claim 14, wherein said data inputting step comprises telecommunication.
17. (previously presented) The method of claim 14, wherein said data inputting step comprises video communication.
18. (previously presented) The method of claim 14 wherein step (b) comprises wireless transmission.
19. (previously presented) A data port interface apparatus as recited in claim 1, further comprising a descrambler disposed in said utility meter housing.
20. (previously presented) A data port interface apparatus as recited in claim 1, further comprising a router disposed in said utility meter housing.
21. (previously presented) A data port interface apparatus as recited in claim 1, wherein said communications network comprises a wireless network.